

# Understanding Equity Across the Student Experience

Planning Report  
February 2021



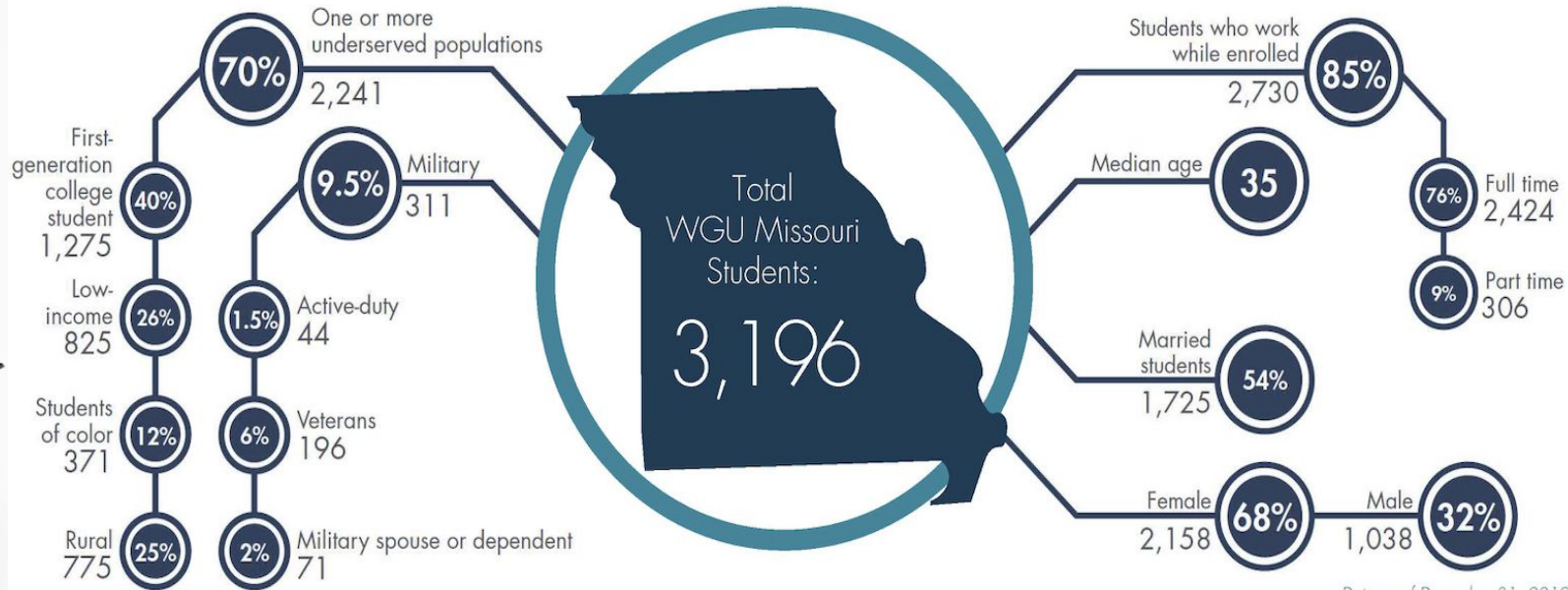
**Jason Levin**  
Executive Director, WGU Labs



**Angie Besendorfer**  
Chancellor, WGU-Missouri



# WGU Missouri Student Population



Data as of December 31, 2019



40% — 19% — 25% — 16%

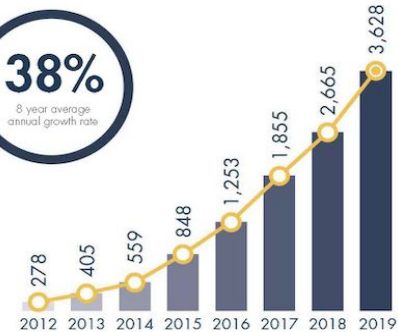
College of Information  
Technology



**28%**  
8 year average  
annual growth rate



**38%**  
8 year average  
annual growth rate



# WGU Missouri | Equity Initiative

- Students of color increased 25% since 2018 (compared to 8% for white students)
- Alumni of color increased 98% since 2018 (compared to 53% for white students)
- Graduation rate for students of color is 39% (compared to 45% for white students)
- Graduation rate for students of color increased 8 percentage points since 2018 (compared to flat for white students)

# WGU Labs | Who are we?



EdTech  
Research  
Design



## Equity Project | Our Why

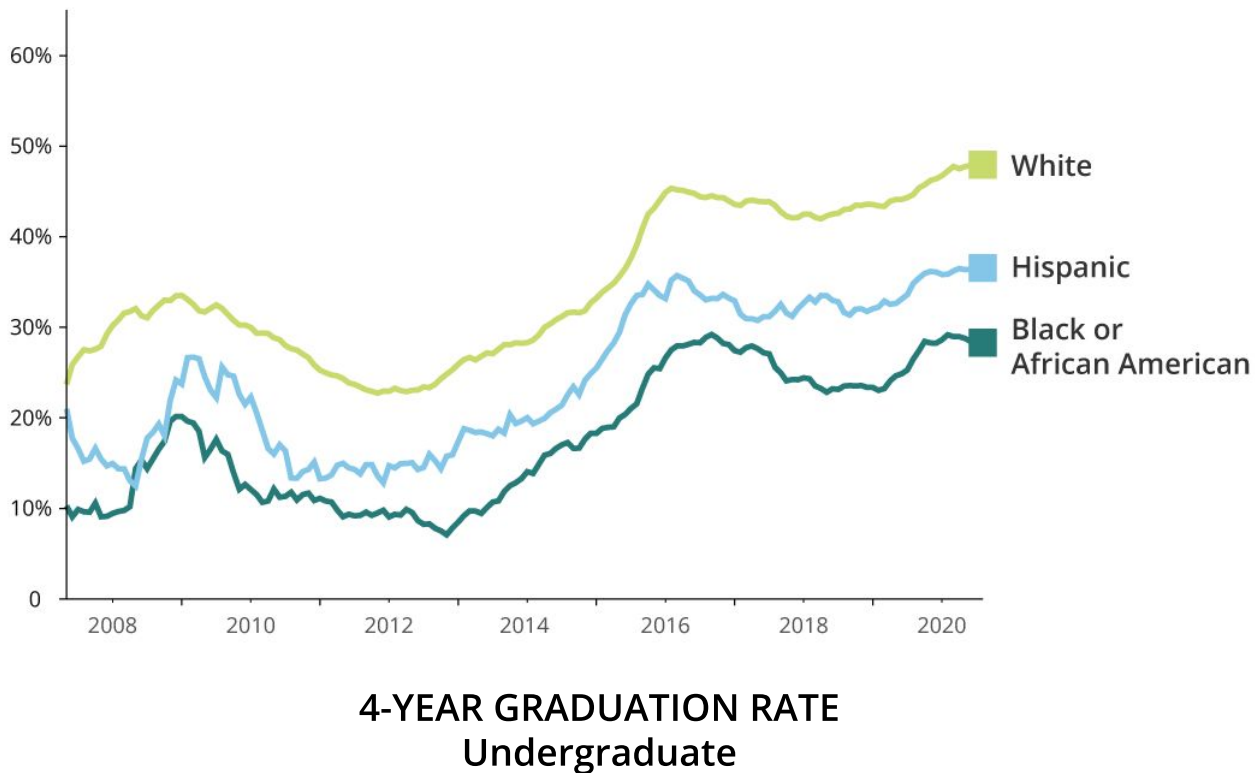


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Layla  
*WGU Student*

“*As part of a minority community,  
you’re not allowed to fail.*”

# Discovery | Our Why



# Equity Project | Two Phases

## 1. Discovery

- Phase completed
- Use data from institutional and individual levels to identify inequity at WGU
- Both quantitative and qualitative

## 2. Planning

- Create future plans based on Discovery data
  - co-design sessions
  - interviews
  - surveys
  - student data



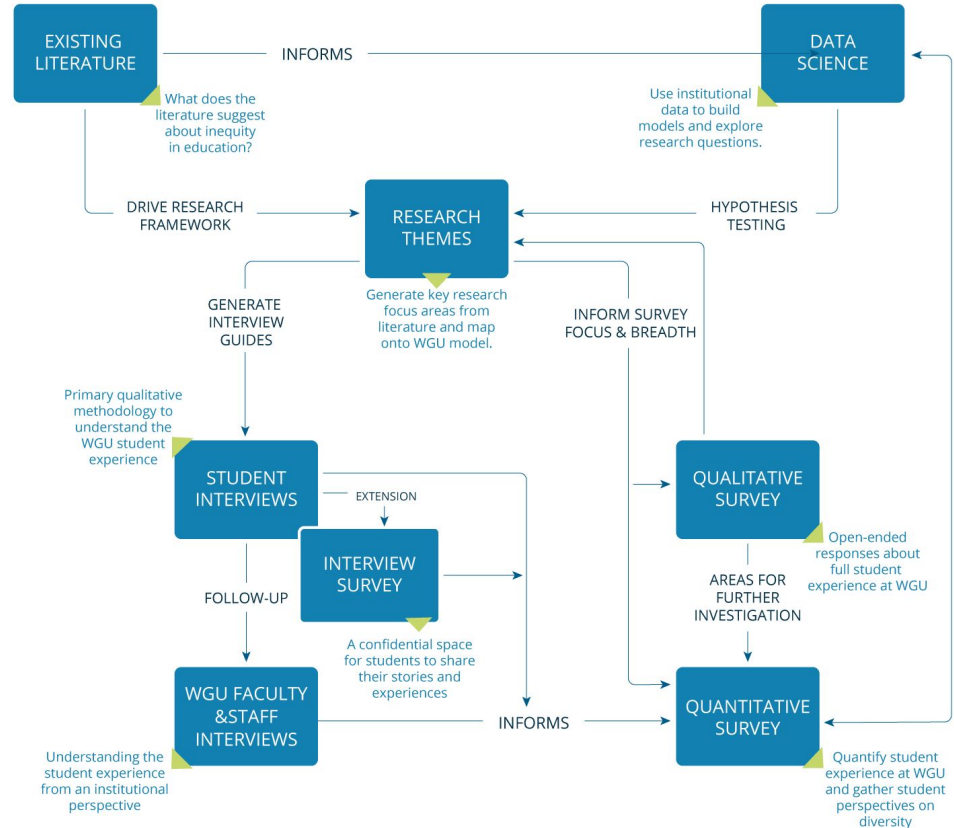
# Discovery | Methodology

## Mixed-methods approach

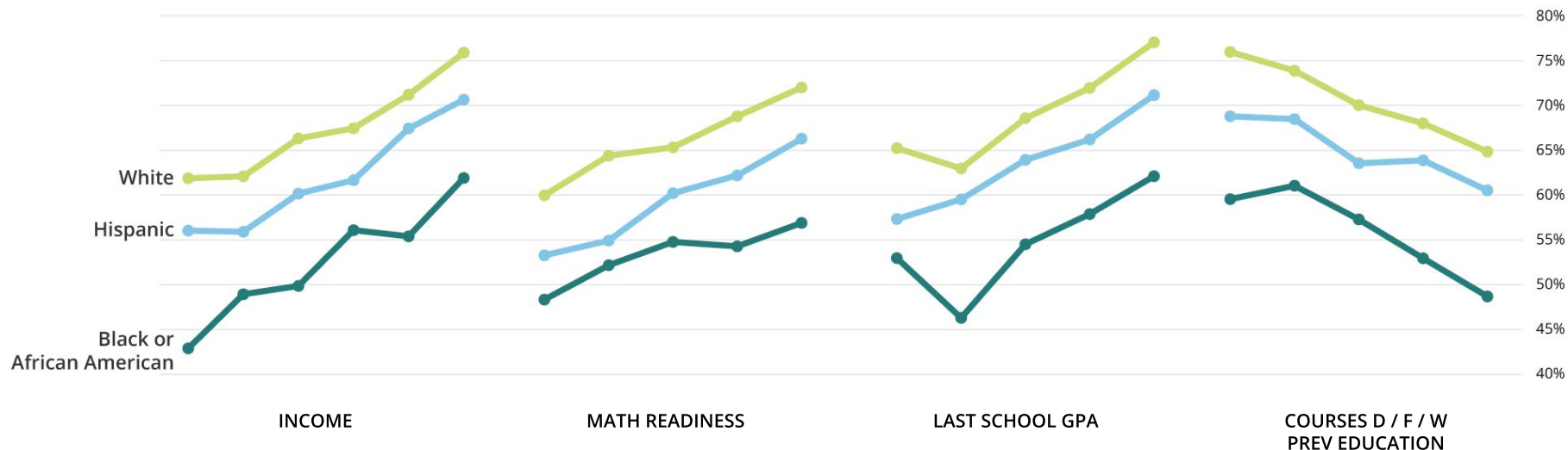
- Quantitative, Qualitative
- Interviews
- Surveys

## Participants

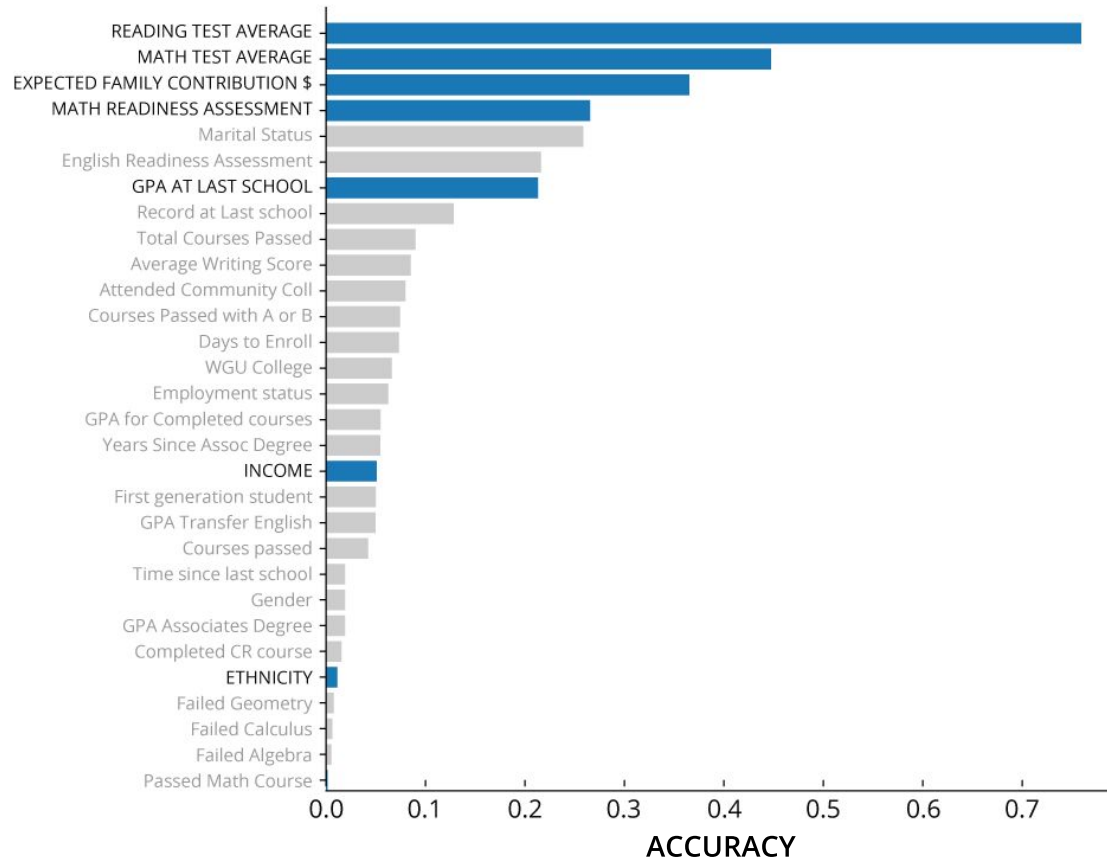
- Students
- Faculty
- Staff

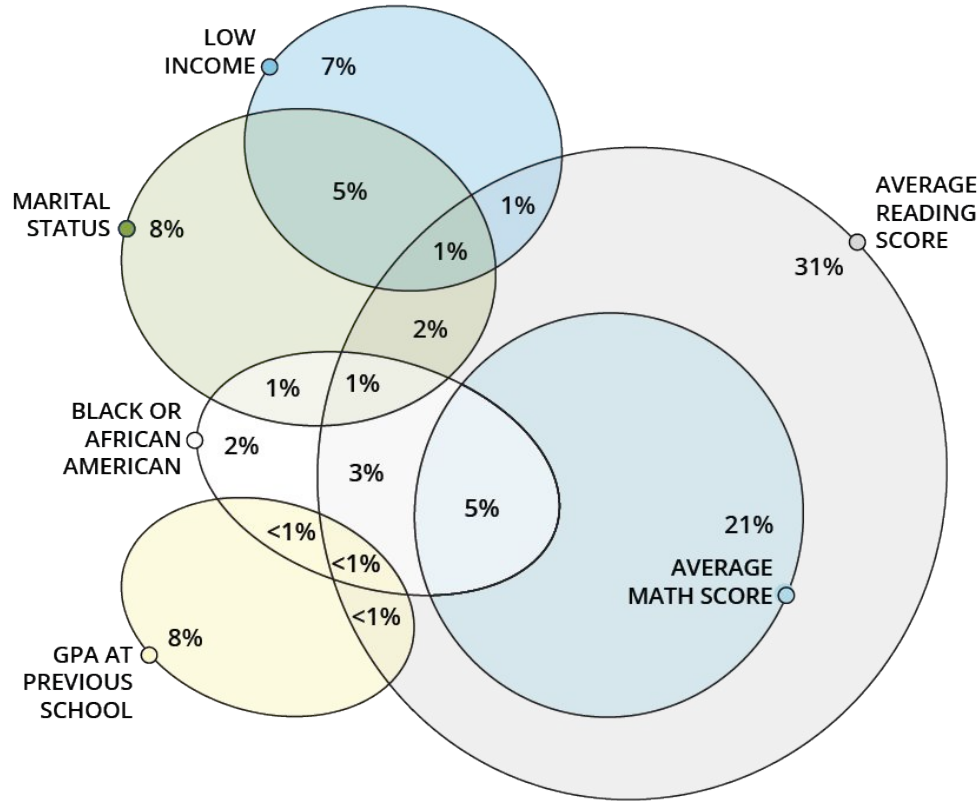


# 24-month retention | Data patterns

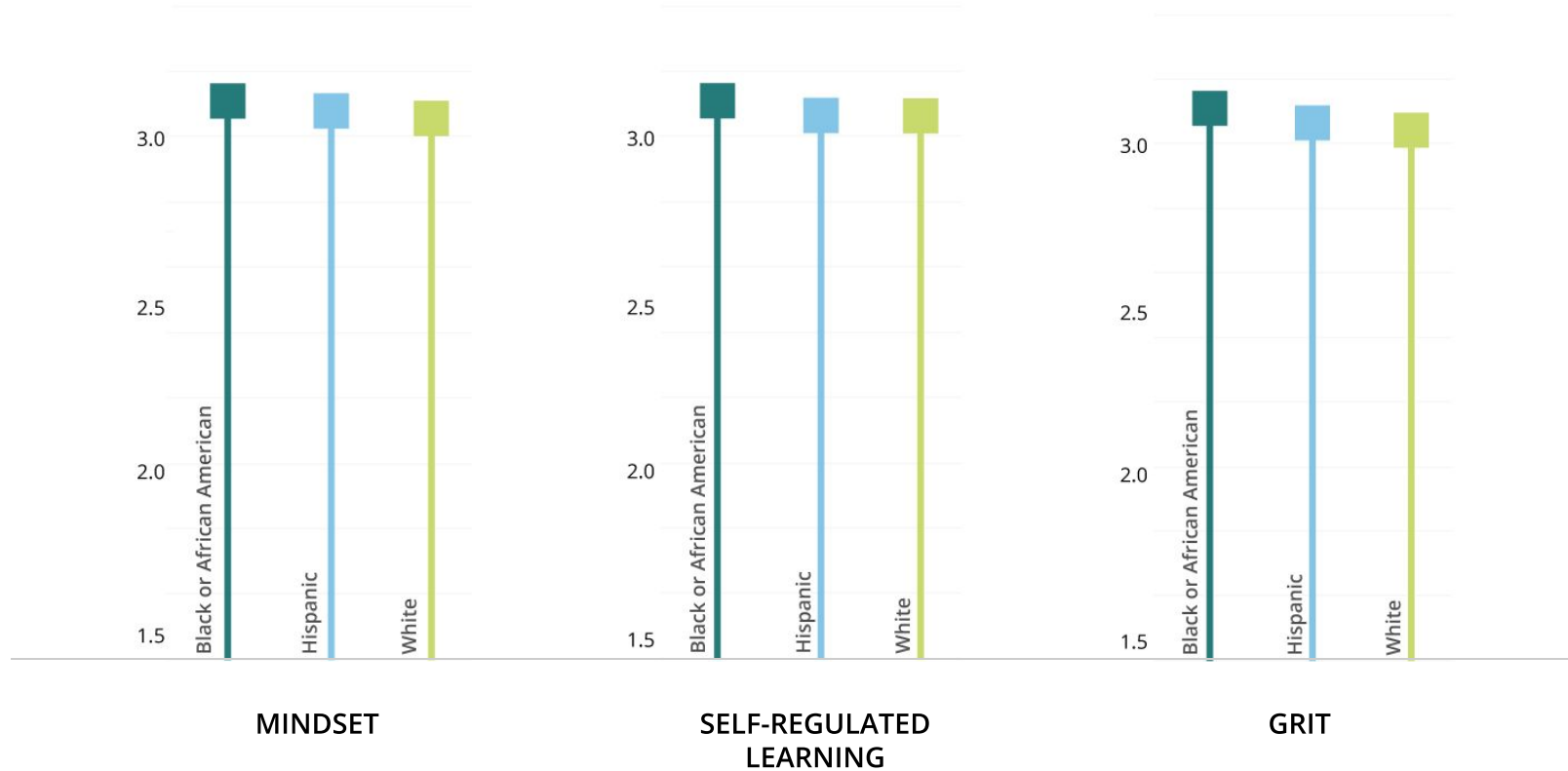


# Student success at WGU | Predictors

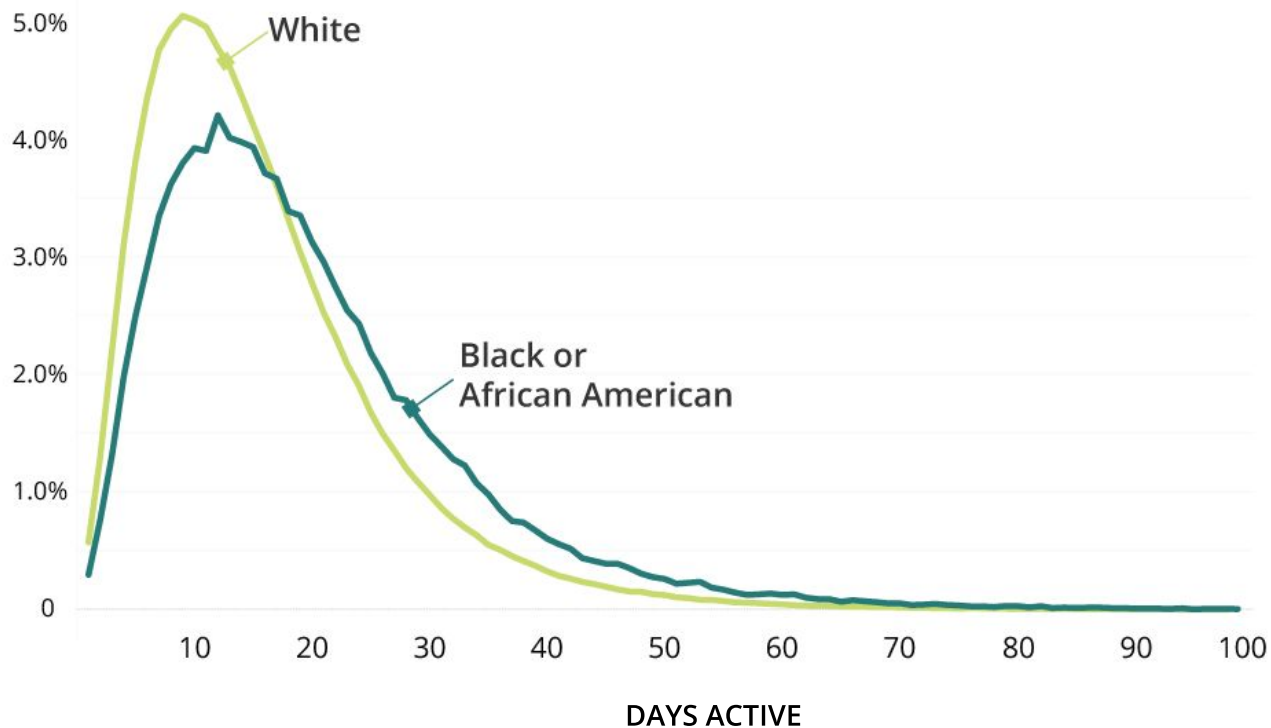




# Learning Skills



# Days Active in Course

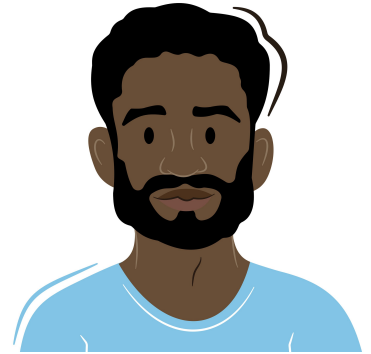


# Discovery Phase | Insights

**Insight #1** Race and identity play a significant, yet complicated role in student outcomes.

**Insight #2** Minority and low-income students report higher levels of important learning skills, but lower Math and reading scores, and take longer to pass their courses.

**Insight #3** Optimizing for the whole can inadvertently overlook costs and benefits to minority populations.



# Planning for Equity | Completed

1. Collaborated with students in co-design sessions
2. Created an equity inventory of existing efforts at WGU
3. Collaborating with integral WGU offices and Employee Resource Groups



# Student Co-Design sessions

- 111 students  
*~4 students per session*
- Student-sourced design solutions  
Listening to student ideas
- Facilitated by Dr Osai  
Assistant Professor of Practice  
Applied Developmental Psychology  
University of Pittsburgh



# Student Co-Design sessions | Student voice

Listening to and including student voices in the process



## Creative Matrix

Challenge your preconceptions about a problem, then go beyond brainstorming to inspire wild ideas

**How might we improve equity at WGU?**

First, select the categories

<b>PEOPLE &amp; PARTNERSHIPS</b> Who are the people involved? Who are the stakeholders? Who are the partners?	<b>EVENTS &amp; PROGRAMS</b> What events or programs are there? What are the activities? What are the outcomes?	<b>GAME &amp; COMPETITIONS</b> What games or competitions are there? What are the rules? What are the prizes?	<b>TECHNOLOGY &amp; DIGITAL MEDIA</b> What technology or digital media are there? What are the tools? What are the platforms?
<b>CELEBRITIES &amp; SUPERSTARS</b> Who are the celebrities or superstars? What are their names? What are their achievements?	<b>MOBILE &amp; WEARABLE TECH</b> What mobile or wearable tech are there? What are the devices? What are the features?	<b>INTERNAL POLICY &amp; PROCEEDINGS</b> What internal policy or proceedings are there? What are the rules? What are the procedures?	<b>SURPRISE &amp; PROVOCATION</b> What surprise or provocation are there? What are the surprises? What are the provocations?
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA</b> What social media are there? What are the platforms? What are the posts?	<b>PHYSICAL VARIATION</b> What physical variation are there? What are the changes? What are the effects?	<b>ENGAGE ALL SENSES</b> What engage all senses are there? What are the senses? What are the experiences?	<b>LIFESTYLE TRACKING</b> What lifestyle tracking are there? What are the trackers? What are the data?
<b>PROCESSES &amp; ENVIRONMENTS</b> What processes or environments are there? What are the steps? What are the spaces?	<b>PUBLIC POLICIES &amp; LAWS</b> What public policies or laws are there? What are the rules? What are the regulations?	<b>HOTSPOTS &amp; HANGOUTS</b> What hotspots or hangouts are there? What are the locations? What are the activities?	<b>ACCESSORIES</b> What accessories are there? What are the items? What are the features?
<b>SHOWS &amp; VIDEOS</b> What shows or videos are there? What are the titles? What are the content?			

What must happen for us to see improved educational equity at WGU?

Creative Matrix

	Student from Racially Stereotyped and/or Minoritized Group	Student is Full Time Worker and/or Parent	Student is Returning, Mature Adult	Student is Financially Under-resourced
Course Structure & Instructional Support (e.g., program name, evaluation, competency items, education needed)	Students should be culturally representative	I have noticed in some courses the same writing genders in every paragraph or paragraph are quite different than the standard theme. I'm not sure if it's a typo or if it's a mistake.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.
Technology, Interface, (as Platform, Language, Presentation, Utility)	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	I noticed the layout of some of the course content was hard to read. It was hard to read and it was hard to read. It was hard to read and it was hard to read.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.
High Level (WU) Leadership Policy changes (payment model, institutional direction, etc.)	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.
Local Culture and Student Life (Interaction with other students, faculty members, etc.)	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.	Students that are not from the same background and are not from the same background should be able to learn.

# Student Co-Design sessions | **Recommendations**



## Increased Interpersonal Connection

*Increased sense of community, learning as a social experience*



## Increased Flexibility

*Allow for unexpected challenges while navigating systemic disadvantage*



## Increased Personalization

*Equity considers the individual in instructional approaches, levels of support, extenuating circumstances*



# Planning | **Equity-First Learning**

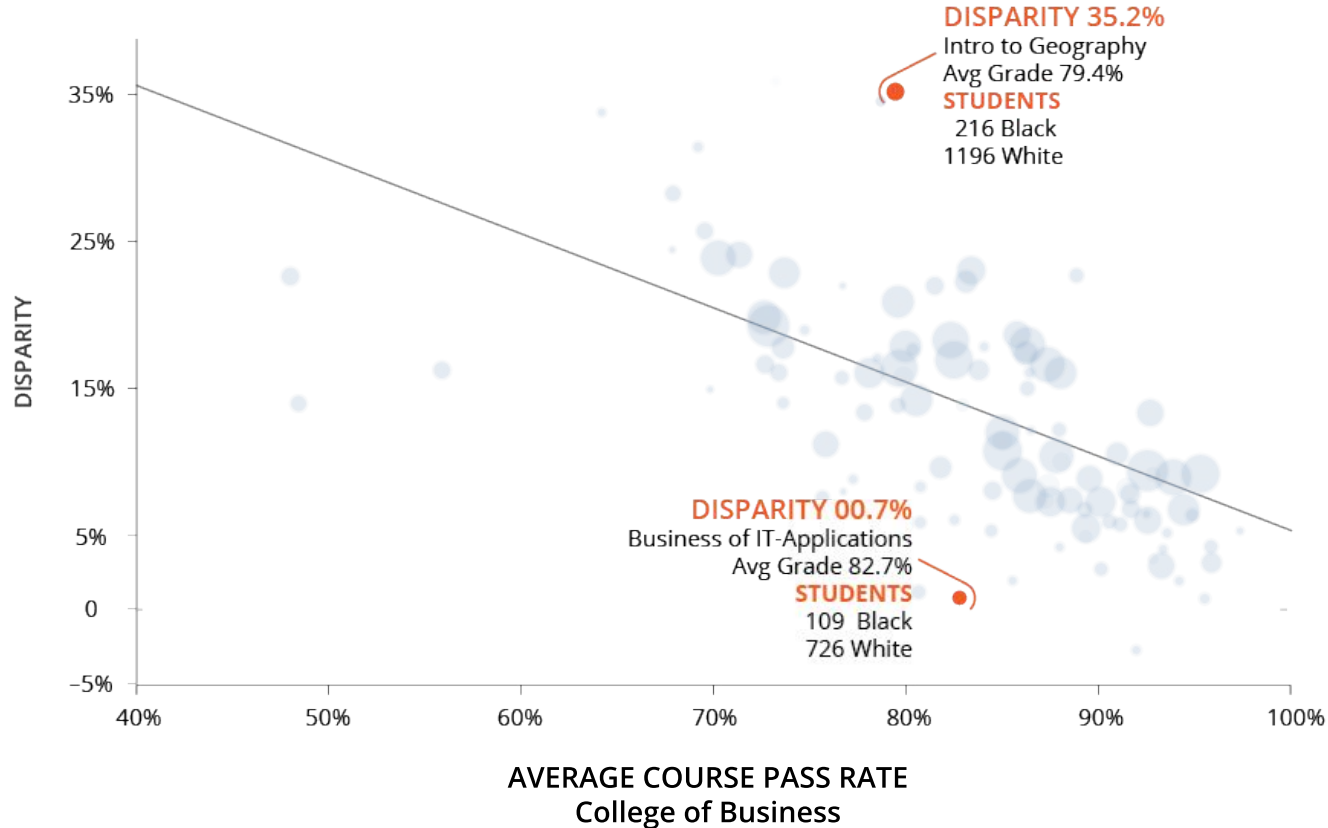
**Equity gaps in course pass rates are pervasive across courses and colleges**

Equity Initiative found consistent expressed need for:

- greater peer-engagement
- active teaching from course instructors
- performance-based assessments to replace objective assessments



# Understanding Variance in Equity Gap



# Equitable Curriculum

**The Problem** Poor cultural competency of existing and new course materials, including assessments

## The Need

- *Systematic* process for students to report culturally incompetent course materials
- Comprehensive review and amendment new and existing course materials
- Assessments that are appropriate measures of student knowledge

## The Change

- Curricula committee for new and existing courses
- Performance assessments where students demonstrate their knowledge and competency
- Equity-based rubric for courses that is openly available

# Study Supporter 2.0

**The Problem** Social support networks essential for effective learning and student success are not adequate.

## **The Need**

- Social support throughout studies
- Pilot was beneficial for Black and African American students, but the effect was hidden in the aggregated data

## **The Change**

- Create more robust, larger study - randomized controlled experiment
- Oversampling minority students
- Follow for two years

# Identity-based Communities

**The Problem** Social support networks essential for effective learning and student success are not adequate.

## The Need

- Enhance peer relationships among students to create community and increase belonging
- A way for students to find community easily
- Meaningful groups

## The Change

- Leverage existing groups to create broader groups based on shared identity
- Centralize groups so they are easier found
- Areas of value -professional development, feedback, networking and advice

# English as a Second Language Support Services

**The Problem** Students with English as a second language finding difficulty with writing tasks over student lifecycle. Help was impersonal.

## The Need

- Centralized place, easily found for support
- Instructors with ESL knowledge
- A human component

## The Change

- Establish centralized ESL Center
- ESL-trained instructors
- Support over entire student life-cycle from admission to graduation
- Faculty and Staff ESL use profile badges to show language diversity and inclusivity

# Faculty Development Center

**The Problem** Students need more high-quality, personalized teaching interactions. Research evidence supports disproportionate *positive impact* of active pedagogy on minority students.

## The Need

- Faculty access to student learning behavior
- Continuous faculty pedagogical training
- Performance-based assessments to replace objective assessments

## The Change

- Create Faculty Development Center
- Lower caseload of students to faculty
- Dashboards and Tools
- Continuous pedagogical Training

# System Change | **Tracking Actions & Outcomes**

## **Tie these actions to outcomes + track progress**

- Who owns each program?
- What institutional checks are in place ensure implementation?
- What are the tracking metrics for progress?
  - Identified before research is done
- Organizational chart of key stakeholders and their roles
- Research
  - How is it used?
  - How is it shared?



## Jason Levin

Executive Director  
WGU Labs  
jason.levin@wgu.edu

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[wgulabs.org](http://wgulabs.org)



## Angie Besendorfer

Chancellor, WGU-Missouri  
Western Governors University  
angie.besendorfer@wgu.edu

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[wgu.edu](http://wgu.edu)

